Depot Town Rag

Volume 22, Number 5

July 2009

100% FREE *RAG* CONTENT

A PUBLICATION OF THE DEPOT TOWN ASSOCIATION, INC. The Old Caboose, 400 Market Place, Ypsilanti, Michigan 48198

Somewhere there's music
How faint the tune
Someone is singing
A depot tune… -Ella Fitzgerald

Listen to the *Music* of the neighborhood

Now, *there's* a familiar tune

-James Mann

Every year the Ypsilanti Community Choir performs the Ypsilanti Comic Song as part of their Spring Concert. The song includes the immortal chorus:

Ypsilanti, Michigan
Ypsilanti wish again
I've got an auntie who lives in a shanty
In Ypsilanti, Michigan!

Few are likely to be aware of the history of the song which was composed by Egbert Van Alstyne with lyrics by Alfred Bryan and published by Jerome H. Remick & Co. in 1915.

Egbert Van Alstyne was born on March 4, 1878 in Marengo, Illinois and grew up to become the composer of a number of popular song and ragtime tunes during the early 20th Century. He is best remembered for "In the Shade of the Old Apple Tree" from 1905, composed with Harry H. Williams. He is credited with having a role in the composing of "Pretty Baby" but what his part was is unclear and is a subject of debate. He spent a great deal of time in Chicago. He died March 4, 1951.

Alfred Bryan was born on September 15, 1871 at Brantford, Ontario, Canada. When living in New York he was a staff arranger for several publication firms. His collaborations include: "Peg o' My Heart", "I Didn't Raise My Boy to be a Soldier", "I'm On My Way to Mandalay", "Oui, Oui, Marie", and "Come Josephine In My Flying Machine". Bryan died in Gladstone, New Jersey on April 1, 1958.

Jerome H. Remick and Company was based in Detroit, with offices, wholesale department and printing plant at 1212-50 Library St. Remick was the leading publisher of ragtime music for the years 1907 to 1912. Their hits included "Dill Pickles Rag" and "Black and White Rag". The company had offices in several cities, such as Chicago and New York, and at each office there was a song plugger ready to perform any piece for a customer. At the New York store on West 28th Street, the young George Gershwin began his career in music as a song plugger. The Detroit home of the Remick Company still stands and is on the National Register of Historic Places.

After the publication of the song, Ypsilanti resident Florence Babbitt wrote to Alfred Bryan to ask if she was the "auntie" who lived in a shanty in Ypsilanti. Bryan responded in a letter dated June 15, 1915, addressed to "Dear Darling Auntie;

"Your very sweet letter is one of those surprises that makes me feel there is nothing really 'surprising' after all, and only goes to show how small the world is after all. Had some blue-eyed, blond-haired 'sweet sixteen' panned me a loving missive of admiration, believe me it would not have occasioned such a pleasant thrill as your letter gave me. Yes, dear heart, I shall autograph several of my recent successes and send them to you, and then, if I may not exceed the limits of familiarity, I shall send you one of my 'photos'.

He signed the photo and added:

"I'm a son to every mother,
And a nephew to every auntie
This photo I am sending to
The one who lives in Ypsilanti"

[See the whole song on page 5...]

Sing a song of Ypsilanti

Sing, dance, and march in the big parade.
Write a poem and put it to music.
Make art about Our Town

"We sing of thee, Ypsilanteeeeee"

A musical about Ypsi?

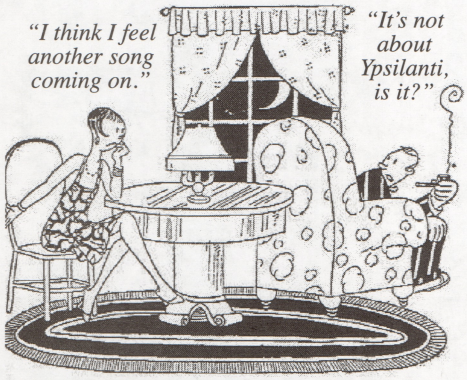
Sing along with Ypsilanti; those happy folks down at the depot and in the downtown district must be doing something right.

The stage is set, the overture supplied by the contrapuntal rhythms of the Mighty Huron River. The performers have been rehearsing in the streets for nearly two hundred years—and the audience just keeps coming back to see what the newest show is all about.

The Musical Box Society International

Band Organs to assemble

Musical Box Society International brings a Band Organ Rally scheduled for July 31 and August 1 in Riverside Park. Organizers plan to have at least 17 trailer units, 23 smaller units, and may bring their smaller instruments to the sidewalks of Depot Town for impromptu performances.



New hymns for the over-50s

"Just a slower walk with Thee,
but my knees hurt"
"Nobody knows the trouble I have seeing"
"Precious Lord, Take my hand,
and help me up"
"Count your many birthdays,
Count them one by one"
"Go tell it on the mountain…but speak up"
"Blessed Insurance"
"Guide me, O great Lord God,
I've forgotten where I parked the truck"

Cline myth laid to rest

Some local country music fans say Patsy Cline lived on the Gault farm in Ypsi Township during WWII. Any truth in this?

"According to school records and her father's military record, Virginia Hensley (later Patsy Cline) was never out of Virginia during the World War II period = December 1941 to August 1945.

"She perhaps sang in Michigan there [in Ypsilanti] because we have no complete record of every place she sang. That would have been after she won Arthur Godfrey's Talent Scouts (21 January 1957) to her death (5 March 1963).

"Hope that helps,
Dr. Douglas Gomery, Official Historian,
Celebrating Patsy Cline, Winchester, VA

An annotated *Depot Town Rag*

By Barton Polot & Tom Dodd

In 1979, Bart Polot was playing the piano at the Gandy Dancer, Dodd was DTA president and the two taught together at Community High. They collaborated on the following Joplinesque tune:

CHORUS: Look at all the people
Gathered 'round the Depot (1)
The good old days are here again
Down in Depot Town!

When plastic living's got you down
Come down to our side of town
Everybody's coming back
Between the River and the Railroad track.
Sing a Depot town refrain,
Wave at every passing train, (2)
Shop for antiques on the block, (3)
Get your old car out of hock. (4)

CHORUS

After decades of decay
Real renewal's here to stay (5)
These city kids are sure not hicks:
They're bound to save this pile of bricks.
Dance and dress just like a gypsy
In this charming part of Ypsi;
Hang out at the Old Caboose (6)
The whole darned district's on the loose!

CHORUS

Come by bike or bus or car
You won't have to travel far
Near the Market you can park (7)
See Frog Island after dark. (8)
Bring a paintbrush, saw, or hammer;
"Preservation," we all yammer.
We are not a bunch of fools
This neighborhood is good with tools.

CHORUS

(Verses ad infinitum….)

FOOT NOTES…

explanations of obscure nouns in the song lyrics at left:

1. Depot: We still gather 'round it, but it doesn't look any better thirty years later.

2. Don't wave. Depot Towners fear that waving at trains will cause people to think we're from Ann Arbor.

3. Antiques: In those days, anything that did not have antiques was a radio repair shop; today, the radios are antiques.

4. City Body continues with new owners, Bruce and Scott Sobbry.

5. Ypsilanti's Historic District Ordinance proved to be a boon to life and business on this block.

6. Caboose: Restored twice since the song sang its praises, it now serves as the Depot Town Association's mail box.

7. Ypsilanti's Depot Town Farmers' Market still gets all the produce and apostrophes in the right places.

8. Frog Island is still a cool place after dark, but the 2008 Depot Town Community Development Corporation (CDC) has lighted neighboring Riverside Park with style-appropriate street lights.

And the verses go on and on with lines about the **Alibi Bar, The Old Town, Detroit's Renaissance Center** (GM Building now), and being **"once as hated as Willow Run."**

With all the changes this block has seen since the song was first sung in our neighborhood bars, perhaps it is time for some new tunesmiths to introduce more up-to-date verses?

The editor always makes good on the promise to publish them here in a future issue of *The Rag*.

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Elvis or somebody who looks a lot like him returns to the block July 10/11

Other Elvis attractions:

Overton Shell,
1928 Popular Ave, Memphis, TN
Swiveled hips here on July 30, 1954. First paid performance. Scared. Said he thought he was "gonna faint right there on the stage," recalls Webb Pierce. "Started flapping his legs just to keep from passing out…"

Sun Studio
706 Union Ave., Memphis, TN
Recorded "That's All Right" on July 5, 1954

Harding's Grocery
120 West Prairie, Vicksburg, MI (now Felpausch's).
Louise Welling, says she saw Elvis alive here in September 1988, 11 years after his death.

J.C. Penney store
Crossroads Mall, Kalamazoo, MI
Welling sees Elvis again, November 1988.

Columbia Plaza Hotel
305 East Michigan Ave., Kalamazoo, MI Elvis's hide-away, according to Welling. Registered as "John Burrows.

Tooth up for auction
Flo and Jesse Briggs, hair stylists from Fort Lauderdale, FL, and no relation to Tracy Briggs who is the manager of this year's Michigan ElvisFest, put Elvis Presley's tooth up for sale at auction. She contended that the tooth was from Linda Thompson, an old girlfriend of The King, and had found the connection from a company that sells artifacts purported to be related to famous personalities.

Mississippi/Alabama Fairground,
W. Main and Mulberry Alley, Tupelo, MS
First public performance. October 3, 1954. 10 years old. Sang "Old Shep" won $5

In Ypsilanti's Depot Town since 2000 A.D.
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"One of the ten festivals in Michigan you'd hate to miss," MiLife MiTimes
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Dozens of Elvis Tribute Artists

Dress for the occasion

Fantasy Attic Costumes' rental manager Wendy Satwicz shows off an "Elvis Jumpsuit" available from their collection. Also on the racks at Fantasy Attic: "Vegas Elvis," "Elvis's Gold Tuxedo," '50s Poodle Skirts, and Elvis-style sunglasses. What a great occasion for all ages to play dress-up again!

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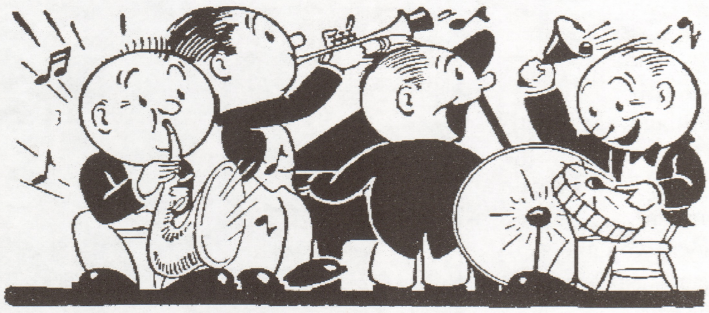
Song-writing TIPS from bloggers

- Play a song that has already been written and write new lyrics over the old ones
- It doesn't even have to rhyme, like a free verse poem, if you have the right beats and rhythm
- The most 'successful' music tends to be 90% familiarity, 10% originality
- Use the online rhyming dictionary!
- Lyrics are not poetry. Most great lyrics don't read well on paper so don't get caught up in flowery language and imagery
- Start with chord progression or start with a title
- Pick a topic you are passionate, emotional, concerned, angry, or excited about
- Let emotions and thoughts work on your physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual awareness
- Write, shape, rinse, repeat...ok, you can skip the rinse part!
- Feel the song taking shape. You're starting to "hear" the chords, the beats, the accompaniment
- Use your sonic, rhythmic, and linguistic imagination
- Read and repeat the lyrics until they taste good in your mouth
- Start out with something easy, like trains, rivers, college towns

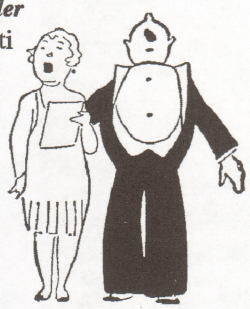


It's official! The City's song

Ypsilanti musician Lee Osler wrote a song for Ypsi in 1983 and City Council accepted it as the City's Official Song: The original arrangement was made by Dr. Morris Lawrence, for whom Washtenaw Community College's community activities building is named. Osler's song was supported by UAW's Solidarity magazine with testimonials from notables around the country.

Osler followed this success in 1986 with "How Would You Feel?, "a sad ballad about homelessness, but the tune ranged much farther beyond Ypsi's city limits.

Back to Ypsilanti *-by Lee Osler*

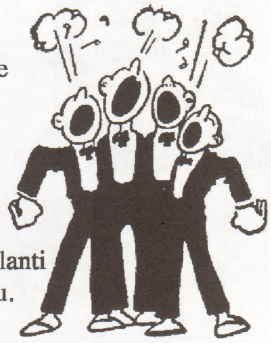


In Michigan there is a place called Ypsilanti
It is a small, small town
I like to think about the times in Ypsilanti
Oh, how they love to get down!

Chorus
I'm moving back to Ypsilanti
Back to Ypsilanti where I come from.
I'm moving back to Ypsilanti
Back to Ypsilanti to have some fun!

It's only thirty miles west of the Big D, Detroit City
It is a small college town.
They all have rhythm and they sing in Ypsilanti
Oh, how they love to get down.

Chorus



In Ypsilanti there's big old water tower.
Ypsilanti: it's a name from ancient Greece
In Ypsilanti people coming every hour.
In Ypsilanti, it's such a nice place to be!

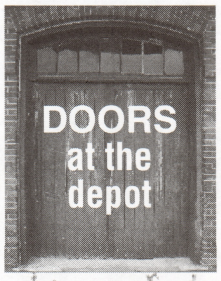
Chorus

In Ypsilanti you can get an education.
Ypsilanti, study hard at EMU
Some people came from overseas to Ypsilanti
Ypsilanti, there's a chance for me and you.

Chorus

Down in Depot Town where they used to hang around
Up on Cross Street where they used to eat at Lee's
Out on Washtenaw where it's such a busy street
Back on the Chicago Road, where it's called the Avenue, I'm told.

In the next *Rag*:



The annual Get-Ready-For-The-Yesterfesters issue examines the doorways and images that tell our stories....

Depot Town Rag

"All the news that fits, we print"
A monthly publication of
the Depot Town Association, Inc.
The Old Caboose, 400 Market Place
Ypsilanti, Michigan 48198
To the editor:
thomasdodd@comcast.net

The Depot Town Association, Inc.

Gary McKeever, President
Merrell Guerra, Vice President
Ruth Ann Jamnick, Treasurer
Sandee French, Scy. & Past President

DTA meets at 6:30 p.m on the third Wednesday of each month at Café Luwak, 42 East Cross Street.

Chewin' the Rag

Why don't we sing the City's Official Song at the beginning of Council meetings? Are the current Councilmembers tone deaf?

Rag: The current city charter forbids the indiscriminate mixing of government and art. Loans, grants, and spontaneous applause are limited to three minutes within one block of City Hall. The Riverside Arts Center is at the northern boundary of the Applause Zone. Special exemptions permit singing on the stage of the amphitheatre in Frog Island Park.

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DETROIT

People who love their towns like to sing about them. Ypsilanti's in good company: "New York, New York", "Chicago", "Kalamazoo", "I Lost My Heart in You Know Where", "Way Down Yonder in New Orleans", "Moon Over Miami", ad infinitum.

Detroit gets a lot of bad press, but where else can you find a city mentioned at least 209 times in published sheet music? Fully 59 songs have been published with "Detroit" in the title.

No song for Athens?

Lyrics solicited for A²

Poor, up-stream Ann Arbor does not seem to have any music written about it, but local wags think the artsy folk from Ypsilanti might be able to come to the rescue of the Arborlanders. With all its hoopla over their gigantic stadium ("Football is Number One; Education Somewhat Less") one might think A² would at least get a phrase in "Hail to the Victors" but, alas, shouts from the playing field go no further than the tailgate parties around its perimeter.

There's plenty to write about in that up-river community; all it takes is a little creativity and chutzpah:

SEND YOUR SUBMISSION TODAY! Email your lyrics to the editor and we'll hum along in the next issue (thomasdodd@comcast.net)

"I understand we upstream city folks don't have a song yet! How ever could that be? Let's get to work on it..."

Just for starters:

"I'd Run a Naked Mile for You"

"I Fought the Law and Paid 5 Bucks"

"Sofas on the Porch"

"Don't Build a High Rise For Me, City Council"

"Mr. Football, USA (reprise)"

"In my Merry Honda Civic"

"Tree Town, Spree Town, Good Old Golden Fee Town"

(see what you can do and drop us an email soon)

Back by popular demand:

TheYpsilanti Comic Song

By Alfred Bryan & Egbert VanAlstyne, Preforming rights reserved MCMXV

Barry LaRue has this copy of the actual sheet music

"The train will pull out just as soon as we sing this song that we have prepared for the occasion..."

I'll sing you a song that's not very long
It's crazy as crazy an be
The verse is as short as a pistol report
And the chorus is longer than me.

CHORUS: Ypsilanti, Michigan
Ypsilanti wish again
I've got an auntie who lives in a shanty
In Ypsilanti, Michigan!

The great Russian Czar
threw away his cigar
Sunday night when I sang it for him;
He ordered me shot
right down there on the spot
And I juggled the ball on my chin

CHORUS

I sang it one night to the Kaiser alright
And he thought I was talking in French.
He gave me a cross, a great big iron cross,
And it hit me right square in the trench.

CHORUS

A woof is a woof and a goof is a goof
And a skee is a skee all the time;
A rose has a scent, but it hasn't a cent,
And ten of them haven't a dime.

CHORUS

A wop is a wop and a cop is a cop
And hair doesn't grow on your brain;
A goo is a goo and a spoo is a spoo.
Please excuse me, I'm going insane.

CHORUS

Ypsilanti Historical Society
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Hours: 2:00 to 5:00pm
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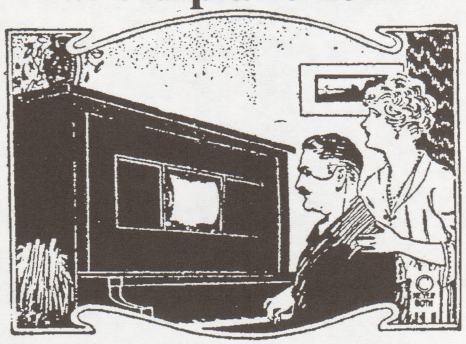
That old piano roll



When they cry, "Play it again, Sam,"when the Freighthouse reopens, almost anybody can play the role of "Sam." The only qualification is that your feet reach the pedals of the old player piano. At least that's what neighborhood folks hope will continue once they get back inside the historic Freighthouse again.

Former owners of the Follett House, Jerry Meadows and Alex and Marybelle Suzcek donated the giant musical instrument and dozens of traditional piano rolls for the good of the community.

Ann Arbor/Ypsi Style

by Jason Beckerleg, The Washtenaw Voice, Washtenaw Community College, Spring/summer 2009

The Ragbirds – Ypsilanti Song

(from Wanderlove, 2007)

The song title says it all. The Ragbirds, who originated in Ypsilanti and later moved to Ann Arbor, really capture the essence of Ypsilanti on this track. People familiar with Ypsilanti's small-town feel will relate to this story about bumping into a particular person everywhere you go. Listening instantly conjures visions of places like the Elbow Room, or sitting out on the patio of the Sidetrack on a hot summer evening with a pint of Oberon.

RAGTIME

"The music is all around us... if we listen." -August Rush

MOTORCYLE MANIA
every Tuesday evening

CRUISE NIGHTS
every Thursday evening

July 3-5
CAMARO SUPERFEST

July 10-11
MICHIGAN ELVISFEST

July 19
GOSPEL CONCERT

July 16
YPSILANTI COMMUNITY BAND

July 24-25
MICHIGAN SUMMER BEER FESTIVAL

July 31-August 1
BAND ORGAN RALLY

Six Friday Nights in July
CROSSROADS FESTIVAL
Downtown Business District

All that...

...came down to Depot Town

Not all the music of this block is created by the rhythm of the railroad. Concerts, parades, bar beats, and acoustic backgrounds flow through this 19th century commercial block with a steady beat.

Live jazz had a great reception in the Freighthouse during the 1980's WEMU/DTA Jazz Series and Frog Island Jazz Festivals.

Stellar performers came from around the country and confided in the organizers that "this old barn is a heck of a lot better performing venue that New Orleans' Preservation Hall." In fact, there was a big movement twenty years ago to use that name rather than "The Freighthouse."

Depot Towners will give a pitch for almost any point of view, of course. We even argued over whether "Freighthouse" was one word or two!

The melody lingers on.

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